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ABSTRACT

In this essay, inquiry concerning school organizations is likened to a hunt and some "hunting stories" are told. The stories deal with two areas of inquiry related to pupil control. One area is concerned with the instruments that serve as operational definitions or measures in the author's pupil control research. The other was concerned with a particular subcategory of the pupil control research "pluralistic ignorance." The author's intention was to demonstrate that inquiry is not a logical cut and dried set of procedures but rather features the unexpected and the enigmatic. An integral part of the process is the testing of the ideas generated to determine if they are empirically warranted, an activity that ordinarily requires substantial decision-making. The two areas of research correspond in a rough way to the two parts of the process of inquiry and illustrate the problematic nature of each. (Author/JM)

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INQUIRY ON SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS: SOME HUNTING STORIES

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As a student of educational organization and administration, I hope to achieve some understanding of how school organizations work, and why they work as they do. Since genuine understanding is grounded in explanation, we come at once to theory, or more accurately, theories.¹

A wide range of theoretical approaches have been used in studies of school organizations. They include social system theory, role theory and bureaucratic theory, to mention a few of them. The approaches used run the gamut from conceptually oriented fragments to quite explicitly formulated frameworks. Empirical support for the various approaches is also very uneven and sometimes difficult to interpret.² This is quite consistent with what the history of science teaches us to expect. Hence, it is no cause for wonder that the theoretical approaches that have guided inquiry on school organizations suffer the limitations that commonly characterize scientific explanations, limitations that find what is perhaps their most vivid expression in the social sciences.

Even so, "scientific" inquiry is the right path to explanation. A heavy burden of proof lies on those who advocate essentially subjectivistic methodologies and modes of analysis for educational administration.³ So far, there has been much discussion, even some polemics, but no research in educational administration that has actually used subjectivistic methods. Unless results obtained using such methods are published, the utility of the

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approaches themselves cannot properly be assessed. I have in mind, of course, the attention given lately to phenomenology in a general way without accompanying efforts to carry out actual research using phenomenological methods. In any case, it is well to be skeptical of those who see salvation in a single method. That notion is no more plausible than the idea of one grand theory of organization. Furthermore, methods and theories lead to warranted explanations, not salvation.

Especially at this early stage in inquiry on educational organizations, we need to be open to a wide range of theories and methods. As I read what is being reported, I see progress gradually being made on a number of fronts. Serious studies of school organization are being produced more often than in the past, and there is some basis for at least a guarded optimism concerning the state and future of the field.⁴

However, my purpose in writing this paper is not to comment on the general health, or lack of it, of inquiry in educational administration. Rather, I propose to share a few of the problems and puzzles I have encountered in my efforts to understand school organizations. Such sharing seems appropriate within a field like ours that, in the relatively short time span of two and a half decades, has become more and more concerned with the processes of knowledge-getting and explanation. Anyway, in inquiry the hunt has a magic all its own. And we just might become better hunters if we shared hunting stories more often. At the very least, something can be learned about the pitfalls and slips encountered on past hunts.

Some Problems and Puzzles

One of the lines of research I have been pursuing for more than a dozen years with a number of students and colleagues deals with pupil control, its

linkages and its consequences for the school organization. This work grew out of a field study done in a junior high school, a study that showed the central part played by pupil control in school life.⁵

Our analysis of what occurred in the school was based essentially on social system theory. We described norms in the teacher subculture, examined what conferred status in the adult group, and looked at socialization. Relationships based on organizational position and role were treated, and we reported on adaptive mechanisms that served to protect the organization and its adult members. The point to be made is that all of these areas of organizational life were influenced one way or another by pupil control. To cite some examples, the most salient teacher norms concerned social distance between teachers and students, low status followed poor discipline, and the main ordeals associated with teacher socialization were connected with pupil control.

The field study research aided me in the development of an analysis of the organizational character of the public school, and of the largely latent adaptive functions of certain common school structures.⁶ These structures were seen as organizational responses to vulnerability, arising from the school's public nature, and to variety, arising from the complexity of the school's tasks and the number and diversity of its clientele. Essentially, such structures operated to increase predictability and to reduce uncertainty for the organization and its personnel.

This analysis was conceptually consistent with what we observed concerning the key place of pupil control in the field study school. The mandated nature of the school-client relationship, the variety of the clientele, and the range of student responses toward the school's services and personnel clearly were connected with the extensive routinization and emphasis on the

regulation of student behavior that was observed, as well as with the kinds of norms featured in the teacher group. Pupil control thus became a focus for a line of inquiry because of its everyday importance in the school, and because it fitted the theoretical treatment being developed of the organizational character of the school.

Although the pupil control investigations grew out of the field study, they employed more traditional research methods.⁷ Two measures were developed that were central to the research. The first, called the pupil control ideology (PCI) form, taps educator views concerning pupil control. The second instrument, which was developed later, was called the pupil control behavior (PCB) form. It gets at educator pupil control behavior rather than attitudes. Pupil control is measured on both of the instruments on a humanistic-custodial continuum. As the terms themselves suggest, scores approaching the custodial end of the continuum indicate more rigid, more punitive, and more moralistic educator pupil control beliefs or behavior. The PCI form is completed by the person whose attitude is sought, while the PCB form is completed by students who supply their perceptions of the behavior of a given educator. In the latter case, the most typical usage is to secure a teacher's PCB by averaging the responses of the students in his class.

The first area of problems and puzzles concerns operational definitions and measurement, specifically in terms of the PCI and PCB instruments. Things are reasonably satisfactory with regard to many of the common problems. The twenty items on each of the instruments fit quite closely the theoretical definitions used of humanistic and custodial PCI and PCB, split-half and occasional test-retest reliabilities commonly tend to be above .9 for both measures, and the usual kinds of validity checks work out well. Such data also

exist for the use of the PCI form to secure respondents' attributions of the PCI of others, and for the use of the PCB form to secure respondents' PCB preferences as contrasted with perceptions.

The instruments can be used to examine a variety of substantive issues that go beyond simple relationships between PCI or PCB and selected personal or social-organizational variables. Relatively basic questions can be addressed such as the relationship between belief (PCI) and behavior (PCB), the relationship of ideals (preferred PCB) and behavior (PCB), the relationship between one's own views (PCI) or behavior (PCB) and those attributed to one's group (perceived colleague PCI), the influence of hierarchy (perceived principal's PCI) on one's own views (PCI) or behavior (PCB), and the accuracy of perceptions (perceived colleague PCI versus actual colleague PCI). These relationships also can be examined in terms of their association with other variables. An example would be a study that looked at teacher PCI-PCB congruence and level of self-actualization, the main hypothesis being that, for teachers, high levels of self-actualization would be a predictor of high consistency in pupil control beliefs and behavior.⁸

The problem is that trade-offs sometimes are made when complex questions are examined. Let me illustrate. It is easy to deal with ordinary PCI or PCB scores, but more difficult to treat PCI-PCB consistency. To do so several steps are necessary. Raw PCI and PCB scores must be converted to standard scores, so that one is not comparing apples and oranges. The necessary conversions may make for a slight artificiality in the distribution of scores. The figure then used to represent the PCI-PCB consistency variable is a difference score, taken from the discrepancy between the standard PCI and PCB scores. The abstract concept of consistency is operationally defined in terms of the

difference in scores on two measures, themselves both operational definitions for other concepts. A trade-off is made if abstractions and their measures are compounded in such a way that violence is done to the empirical world.

Obviously, paper and pencil instruments are already a generous step away from what they purport to represent. The converted difference scores add a little distance.

A similar kind of problem occurs when mean scores or means of means are employed. Thus, if one wishes to take the entire faculty of a particular school as a unit of analysis, a mean PCI score is used, and if a mean faculty PCB score is used, it represents a mean of means. In both cases, a relatively abstract concept is employed and operationally defined by the manipulation of available numerical data. Clearly, the procedure is convenient, but decisions on such definitions should be made deliberately.

The basic problem is, of course, general to science. Operational definition and measurement occur on a level of abstraction below that of the theoretical concepts that guide research, but also on a level above that of the "phenomena" themselves. Integrity or fit is always problematic.

In any event, precautions can be taken. With regard to the pupil control instruments and others like them, it's a good start simply to recognize and make explicit their limitations. They are not only rather pale reflections of experience, but they are also time bound and place bound, conditions that pertain for virtually all such measures. That is why we treat the pupil control forms simply as research devices. We do not see them as tests that should have established norms. We try not to make extravagant claims.

In specific instances, appropriate statistical analyses can speak to certain problems. Let me give two straightforward examples. Examination of

the distribution of the scores that are averaged to furnish a mean score can tell us something. Perhaps the mean score is quite representative of a set of scores, perhaps it is derived from two sets of extremely different scores. With regard to the use of difference scores, I recently learned of a statistic, based on a formula that includes the calculated reliabilities of the separate scores and the correlation between them, that estimates measurement error reflected in the difference score.

Information gained using paper and pencil instruments can, of course, be checked using other methods. Interviews and observations are the most obvious ones. These methods also have their strengths and weaknesses, but that is a good reason for using several methods to check and balance one another, if it is possible and feasible to do so.

These then are some of the problems encountered with the pupil control measures. In addition, I have two regrets concerning their construction. The PCI form has only two of its twenty items reverse scored. Many of the reverse items, stated in the humanistic direction, were rewritten because respondents to early versions of the instrument indicated such items sounded too "pedagogical." Also, a number of them were dropped after an item analysis was carried out. At the time, we thought that there were sufficient reasons for the one-sided mix of items, but we should have persisted in assuring a more even one.

A second regret is the terms humanistic and custodial. For many individuals, the words have emotionally loaded meanings--the one positive, the other negative. In an early paper, I wrote about internal and external control and would have preferred those or other more neutral terms. However, in our search of the literature, we found some work on the patient control ideologies of mental hospital personnel. We adapted the descriptions of the

control styles used in that research to public school situations, and used the adapted descriptions as the definitions against which we checked the items we devised. Because we wanted to credit the earlier study, we used its terms, humanistic and custodial.

In spite of some problems and regrets, the pupil control instruments have been highly useful in mounting a line of inquiry as contrasted with doing bits and pieces of unrelated research. A fairly large number of the studies using these measures have resulted in failure to reject the hypotheses tested. I attribute this to the fact that pupil control is indeed a cardinal feature of school life. In other words, the instruments get at something that is important in school organizations. However, such measures are research devices and nothing more. They are one means to the end of enhancing our understanding of school organizations.

I turn now to a somewhat more substantive discussion of one of the areas of research carried on within the general line of inquiry on pupil control, namely our work on pluralistic ignorance.⁹ The concept of pluralistic ignorance refers to the shared misperception of an attitude, belief or norm held by members of a group. The general tendency in the limited number of studies done on the topic is to find pluralistic ignorance in a conservative direction. This means that a shared misperception is held to the effect that the members of a particular group are more conservative with regard to a given attitude, belief or norm than they are in reality.

Our studies of pluralistic ignorance have dealt entirely with educator pupil control beliefs or PCI. Pluralistic ignorance is operationally defined in this work in terms of the difference between the PCI attributed to the members of a particular group and the PCI actually held by the members of that

group. In our research we have used three organizational positions--teacher, principal and guidance counselor--as the objects of attribution of PCI, and the same three positions as sources of attribution. In other words, we have asked teachers, principals, and counselors to estimate the PCI of specified groups of teachers, principals and counselors. This design provides nine possible combinations: the PCI attributed to teachers by teachers, by principals and by counselors, and so on for each position.

One feature of this research was that, in some cases, we asked individuals to make PCI attributions to groups in which they themselves held membership. A second, and distinctive feature, was that we studied pluralistic ignorance using different levels of abstraction for the focus of attribution. To illustrate, in terms of more abstract to less abstract, in various investigations carried out, we have asked respondents to attribute PCI to "the typical teacher," to "the typical teacher in this school district," to "the typical teacher in your building," and to the typical teacher in one's informal group. In the latter instance, teachers were asked to "list the teachers in this school with whom you are good friends," and were then requested to respond to the PCI form as they thought the typical teacher among those they had listed would respond.

With regard to the teacher position, our findings have been quite consistent. Teachers are perceived to be more custodial in PCI than they actually are. This is, of course, in line with the conservative direction of pluralistic ignorance that has characterized past research results.

In our studies, the discovery of pluralistic ignorance in a custodial direction with teachers as the object of attribution is pervasive. In every study we conducted of pluralistic ignorance and in other cases where we had

data enabling comparisons of attributed and actual teacher PCI, the differences between attributed and actual PCI typically have been quite pronounced and markedly significant in statistical terms. This pattern holds regardless of the source of attribution. All three kinds of respondents--teachers, principals, and counselors--over-attribute custodialism to teachers.

We have done fewer studies with the principal's position as the focus of attribution. However, the findings parallel those for the position of teacher. Principals are perceived to be substantially more custodial in PCI than is actually the case. This perception holds across the board. That is, it is shared by the members of all three positions serving as sources of attribution. These misperceptions in a custodial direction concerning principals should be viewed against another consistent finding in our research, namely, that principals are more humanistic in PCI than are teachers.

The guidance counselor position has been the least studied of the three positions. In fact, there has been only one investigation that systematically examined pluralistic ignorance in PCI with the counselor position as the focus of attribution. The results for the counselor position deviated sharply from the pattern of custodial pluralistic ignorance that characterized attributions for the teacher and the principal positions. Teacher estimates of counselor PCI were not inaccurate in the sense that there was no significant statistical difference between teacher attributions of counselor PCI and actual counselor PCI. However, both principals and counselors perceived counselors to be somewhat more humanistic in PCI than they actually were. These attributions constitute unusual instances of liberal, as contrasted with conservative, pluralistic ignorance. However, the results in these two cases of pluralistic ignorance in PCI in a humanistic direction were not nearly so

pronounced and unequivocal as the results for the more typical pattern of custodial pluralistic ignorance found for teachers and principals. It should also be noted that, like principals, counselors are more humanistic in PCI than teachers.

Our findings on the level of abstraction of the focus of attribution for the teacher position have been remarkably consistent, with the exception of those from one investigation. Data gathered in four studies had fallen into a perfect pattern so that the more abstract the level of the focus of attribution, the greater the pluralistic ignorance in a custodial direction. In other words, the level of custodial pluralistic ignorance was greatest when "the typical teacher" was specified as the focus of attribution, but it decreased progressively for "the typical teacher in this school district," "the typical teacher in your building," and the typical teacher among those listed as good friends. It should be noted that, even though the difference between attributed and actual PCI was small in the last instance, it was still a statistically significant one.

The exception to these results was furnished when, as part of a study on other topics, we gathered information last year on attributed and actual PCI in four schools. The specified focus of attribution was "the typical teacher in your building." The level of pluralistic ignorance turned out to be greater than that previously found for that attribution, even greater than that reported in one study for the more abstract designation, "the typical teacher in this school district."

The general finding of custodial pluralistic ignorance for the teacher position, of course, remains intact. What is broken is the previously perfect pattern that related the level of pluralistic ignorance, as measured by the

magnitude of the difference score between attributed and actual PCI, to the level of abstraction of the focus of attribution. In any case, as we all know, perfect patterns don't last long in social science research.

One other extremely tentative finding emerged from last year's inquiry. In each of the four schools, information was gathered concerning respondents' perceptions of the PCI of their principal, and we also secured the actual PCI scores of these four administrators. In three cases, pluralistic ignorance in a custodial direction was exhibited, but in one case, pluralistic ignorance in a humanistic direction was exhibited. None of the difference scores was small, although the latter was the smallest.

In these four cases, we are at the lowest rung of the level of abstraction ladder. Respondents attributed PCI to a single designated individual. Yet, their misperceptions were pronounced, although not uniform in direction. The general, if imperfect, relationship that held for teachers between the level of pluralistic ignorance and the level of abstraction of the focus of attribution may not hold for principals. Results such as these can lead to interesting speculations. However, it should be kept in mind that the findings themselves are highly tentative because of the small number of individuals involved in last year's study.

So much for our various findings on pluralistic ignorance. I turn now to the question of explanation. We took up the investigation of pluralistic ignorance in the first place because we had some ideas or prior explanations about how this aspect of school organizations worked.

My initial conjectures were quite straightforward. Norms in the teacher subculture tend to sustain and protect teachers in their relationships with students. For example, there are norms for the maintenance of social distance

between teachers and pupils, norms that proscribe the criticism of colleagues in front of students, and so on. In social systems pressures are exerted on members to conform to norms, so people tend to conform in public and sin in secret. Hence, teachers are likely to maintain social distance between themselves and students, and may even exhibit quite exaggerated pupil control behavior in places in high visibility to colleagues such as the corridors and the assembly. To use Goffman's term "on-stage behavior" occurs.¹⁰ And even in "back-stage" locations like the faculty lounge much tough talk concerning student discipline can take place. In fact, all of the types of activities mentioned were noted many times in the field study that preceded the pupil control work.

In any case, all of this conveys to the observer the general impression of rigid or custodial views on pupil control and thus, leads directly to the prediction of pluralistic ignorance in a custodial direction concerning PCI. This, of course, is the general hypothesis that guided our studies of pluralistic ignorance.

So far, so good. The development of hypotheses is one of the most interesting aspects of inquiry, an aspect that taxes the imagination and ingenuity of the investigator. However, a hypothesis is only a beginning. It needs to be tested and some warrant furnished for its rejection or support.

But even that is not enough. In proper science, it is the business of the researcher to attempt to disprove his hypothesis, and if possible, to disprove reasonable alternative hypotheses as well. As we all know, given the nature of science and especially its self-corrective character, hypotheses are never proved, rather they are not yet disproved. Even if some major alternative hypotheses have been disproved, there is always the possibility

of an alternative hypothesis that will be more adequate than any of its predecessors. But such matters may seem somewhat remote. After all, alternative hypotheses typically are not given a lot of attention, especially in social science research.

Even so, the alternative hypothesis issue remains. It is one of the problems we were and still are concerned with in our pluralistic ignorance studies. In this instance, it is not a matter of competing prior hypotheses leading to difference predictions, but one of alternative explanations. Recall that our explanation was that teacher verbalizations and behavior in places of high social visibility gave a systematic impression of greater custodialism in pupil control views than actually existed. This was a prior explanation that fitted our general theoretical ideas and some of our empirical observations of school organizations. Hence, it was a congenial explanation. I suppose that should be enough to make one suspicious or at least cautious. In any event, we have tried to take alternative explanations very seriously as we have puzzled over the intricacies and ramifications of the pluralistic ignorance work.

One such explanation is that respondents somehow detect points of view in the items of the PCI form, see humanistic type responses as desirable and custodial type responses as undesirable, and respond so as to depict themselves in desirable terms and others in less desirable terms. This explanation could be examined primarily in terms of the validity of the PCI form. However, since that device has reasonably good validity, to do so would be to give the explanation short shrift. Its strength apparently lies in the sense it makes in psychological terms, the idea that people tend to protect themselves by painting themselves in more desirable hues than they paint others.

However, such protective perceptions are likely to be related to personality variables. Presumably, those with stronger self-concepts would not exhibit them. Moreover, the desirability question is not clear cut. I am not so sure that educators would uniformly see a permissive pupil control view as more desirable than one stressing a stricter orientation. In addition, one set of data doesn't fit the explanation. Teachers, principals and counselors all perceive the typical counselor to be more humanistic than they themselves--the responding teachers, principals and counselors--are.

These considerations strike at the plausibility of this alternative hypothesis. Nevertheless, it could be examined or at least touched on in several ways. One would be to probe the idea directly using appropriate methods such as depth interviews. Another would be to examine the personality and protective perception question, and still another would be to gather data on the desirability issue.

A second alternative explanation, buttressed by some of the level of abstraction data, is that custodial pluralistic ignorance in PCI represents general orientations, almost stereotypes, held concerning teachers, principals and counselors. Such views could be in line with and reinforced by experiences undergone as a student. Here, I assume the general stereotypes of the teacher and the principal to be more or less of disciplinarians, but that of the counselor to be much less so.

One way the notion of general orientations of this kind could be examined is by determining whether pluralistic ignorance exists in populations outside of the adult members of the school organization.

However, in pursuing this or other follow-up research, a judgment regarding its utility is required. It is not as easy unequivocally to reject explanations as it might seem on the surface. For one thing, competing

explanations often don't really compete. It is rare for contradictory predictions to be derived from "competing" explanations. Usually, the predictions are merely different in focus and emphasis, and are not in genuine conflict with one another.

An additional concern is multiple causation. It would not come as a shock if empirical support were found for each of several alternative explanations in the area under discussion, or in some other area of social research. None of us needs to be reminded of the complexity of psychological, organizational, and social phenomena, and of the limitations of our methods and our theories.

Even so, the consideration of alternative explanations is an important part of the hunt for understanding. In our small efforts to get a better intellectual grip on the place of pupil control and pluralistic ignorance in school organizations, we have given them considerable thought and expect to do at least some empirical follow-up.

We are also puzzling over some of the level of abstraction data, seeking an answer to its meaning. Obviously, a teacher's attribution of views to his typical close colleague and to his principal are not the same thing, even though both referents are quite specific. In the case of the teacher's attributions to the principal, the barriers imposed and perceptions added by hierarchy clearly play a part that cannot be ignored.

Another aspect of the pupil control-pluralistic ignorance picture involves the conditions under which the various position incumbents interact and observe one another. In this, the bulk of our present concern is with the principal and counselor positions, since we feel we have a better grasp of these conditions with regard to teachers.

Still another kind of concern centers on task accomplishment in school organizations. Pluralistic ignorance of the kind found suggests that the work of teaching and administration might demand behavior that is not consistent with personal predilections of many teachers and administrators, or with the ideals espoused in their preparation programs.

However, I will not develop these ideas any further here. Perhaps enough has been presented to indicate the kinds of problems and puzzles we have encountered and pondered in this one area of our research.

Concluding Comments

In this short essay, I have likened inquiry to a hunt, and I have recounted a few hunting stories. The stories that were told dealt with two aspects of a line of inquiry on the part played by pupil control in school organizations. One aspect was concerned with the instruments that served as operational definitions or measures in much of the research. The other was concerned with a particular subcategory of the research, the investigation of pluralistic ignorance.

The presentation was not cast in the form of a research report or review. Instead, I choose to emphasize the misgivings, and the problems and puzzles that are part and parcel of the hunt for understanding. Inquiry is not the cut and dried set of procedures that some believe it to be. It is a process that features the unexpected and the enigmatic. An integral part of the process is the teasing out of explanatory ideas. At the same time, the tentative and transitory nature of the ideas is emphasized. They exist to be replaced by more cogent ones. Another integral part of the process is the testing of the ideas generated to determine their empirical warrant, an activity that ordinarily requires substantial decision-making. The two aspects of our

research that were the objects of our hunting stories correspond in a rough way to these two parts of the process of inquiry, and illustrate the problematic nature of each.

I hope the stories have at least some utility for students of school organizations, and for practitioners of educational administration as well. After all, both those who study school organizations and those who administer them share the need to develop explanations and understandings about how and why such organizations work as they do. And both need to cultivate a realistic sense of what inquiry is all about--its problems and limits as well as its utility and elegance.

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